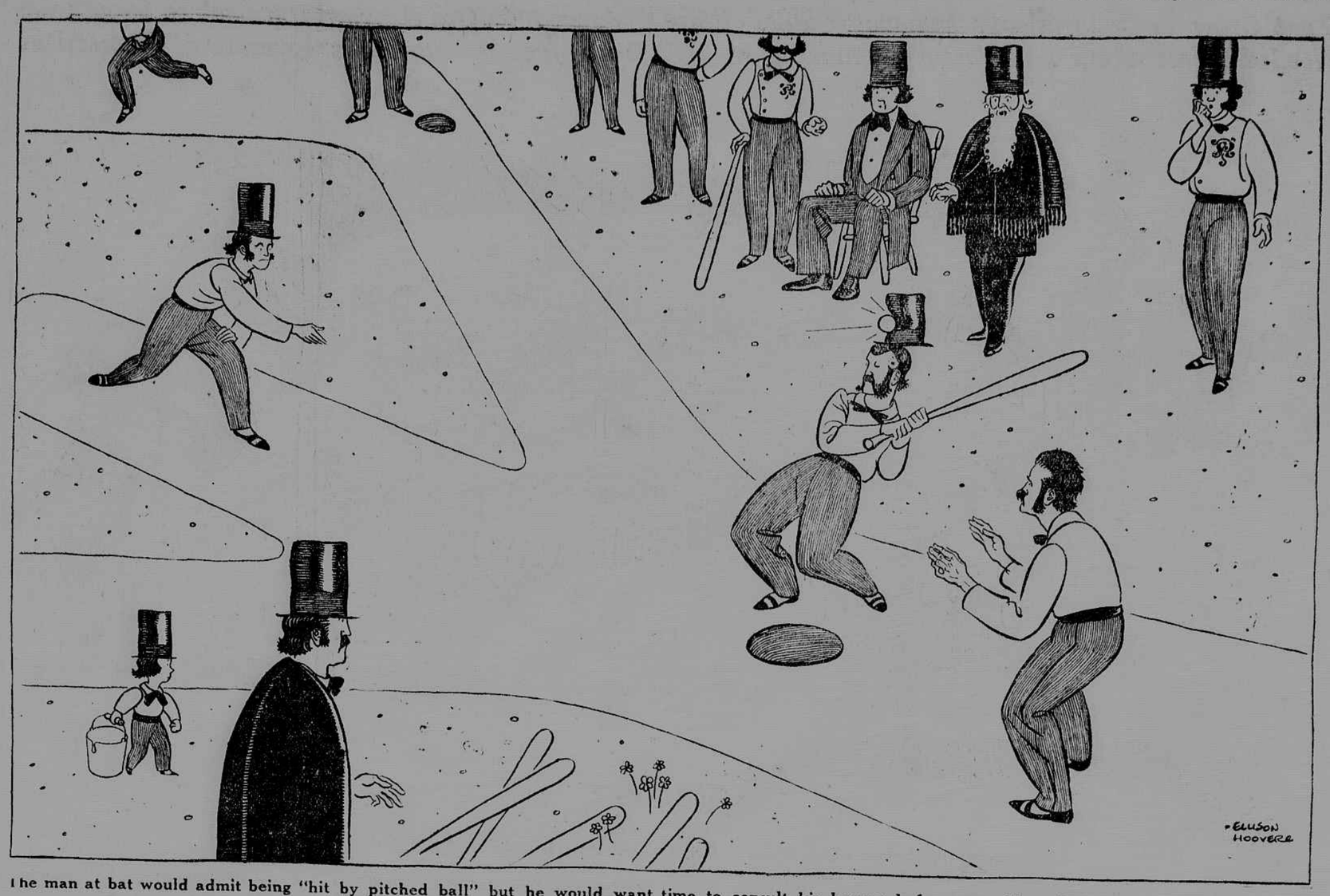
BASEBALL VARIES BOTH ITS TOGS AND ITS TALK

While the Trousers Have Grown Shorter, the Vocabulary Has Grown Longer. Modern Diamond Chatter Would Mystify Those Boys of the Sixties

By TORREY FORD

Illustration by Ellison Hoover

Early Ball Games Were Reported With Dignity and Restraint, in Pure English. Players Never 'Fanned' or 'Whiffed'; They Simply Struck Out



The man at bat would admit being "hit by pitched ball" but he would want time to consult his lawyer before conceding that he had been "beaned"

RIP VAN WINKLE could never have been a baseball fan; at least, not a regular, rabid one. No man who really takes his baseball seriously would consider going to sleep for twenty years. He could hardly expect to get any enjoyment out of the game when he came back. Baseball moves too fast.

It isn't the game that changes. Baseball has followed along in the same old rut except for a few minor alterations, such as the out on fouls passing into history and the moist ball falling into the discard. But for the language of the sport, the strict terminology, the baseballese of the stands and the sporting columns—no man can lift his eyes for more than a passing moment and hope to keep up with the times.

Take the case of the poor individual who goes to bed some summer evening firmly convinced that "packing the corners" is the absolute, scientifically pure term used by the best people to denote filling the bases. He tells his wife about it and discourses at length on the subject to his youngsters. He is a great man in the bosom of his family for the moment.

Imagine his horror, his chagrin, his unmitigated shame on waking in the morning to discover that "packing the corners" has faded from the baseball horizon. The cry of the new day is "stuffing the cushions."

But that's baseball. You can't reach out and put your finger on any one term and say: "This is great! The perfect phrase. This will survive." To-morrow it may be gone.

Aided and abetted by the sport writers and the gifted patrons of the stands, baseball lingo is bandied about to conform to the spirit of the hour. Nobody attempts to apply the brakes. Precedent has no divine privilege. Home plate may have been home plate for forty years, but if some one takes a notion to call it a soup dish and the expression takes with the fans, home plate is doomed to be nothing more nor less than a soup dish.

There are no arbitrary rules about coining new phrases and nicknames. In the long run the sporting writers do most of it, but often their products are mere reflections of grandstand sentiment.

A big fat man, who hasn't missed a game in a decade, may stand up some hot afternoon and bawl out the umpire for a raw decision at third. He may get so excited about it that he forgets himself and blusters something about the umpire being a near relative of a hunk of bologna. The crowd picks it up and howls: "Oh, you hunk of bologna!" From that moment on any official who fails to please the crowd is immediately dubbed a hunk of bologna. It's the way of the game.

Running back through the newspaper files of the last half century suggests some of the eccentric quirks of the baseball language. But when it comes to following up the derivations, the trail is blind.

A common, ordinary base on balls suddenly appears as a pass. A few seasons roll by and it becomes a walk. There are no marginal notes in the newspaper to explain the mystery. A base on balls may have seemed undignified, or perhaps it didn't cover the case sufficiently. Who can tell?

Then there is the matter of spectators, the long-suffering public. During a siege of years they have passed through the various stages of being called audience, assemblage, cranks, fanatics, fans, populace, patrons and down to the ultra modern cash customers.

It isn't as though the whole language went through a physical metamorphosis every now and then. A book review of fifty years ago is highly intelligible, following the same general formula as that in vogue to-day. Critics of the '60s spoke of books being "readable but insignificant." Dramatic critics used identical phrases in favor with current writers. But a baseball story of the '60s reads as though it were written in a strange tongue.

On July 20, 1866, The Tribune devoted an entire paragraph on the back page to an account of the exciting encounter between the Empires and the Eurekas.

"A very pleasant meeting was had yesterday," runs the report, "between the amateurs of the above clubs, the result being the signal success of the Empires by the score of 79 to 35 in a contest of six innings. Benson, Burns and Holwell led the score on the Empire side, and Ageus, Bolles and Utter on the part of the Eurekas. After the game the Empires hospitably entertained their friends."

On August 2 of the same year the Empire club again broke into the headlines in the following terms:

"The Eckfords obtained quite a victory yesterday over the Empires, they scoring 53 to 23. Some good play was shown on both sides, but the batting decided the contest. Fly-catches: Empire, 11; Eckford, 4."

Apparently in those days the sporting department was a sideline of the society editor. A modern sporting writer sent out on the same assignments might produce something on this order:

"The Empire regulars got the jump on the Eureka rookies by piling up a big lead in the opening stanza of yesterday's game and pulled out an easy win, 79 to 35. Benson, Burns and Holwell, the slugging Empire trio, furnished most of the thrills of the afternoon, though Ageus, Bolles and Utter did well for the Eureka contingent. The game was called at the end of the sixth to permit the Empire team to catch a train."

And of the Empire defeat the story might run: "Eckford bunched hits in the fourth and seventh innings here to-day, winning from Empire, 53 to 23. Gibbons held the local batsmen helpless through most of the game, and was relieved by Johnson in the eighth."

More difficult it might be to imagine the production a writer of the '60s would turn out if sent up to cover a Giant-Cub double-header. Still, it would certainly follow this general line:

"Players of the New York professional ball club entertained members of the Chicago team yesterday afternoon at the Polo Grounds. Two games of ball were indulged in, the New Yorks being victorious throughout the afternoon on account of some nice batting. Several thousand persons were on hand for the fun."

By 1884 baseball had taken such a hold on the public that the experts began to come into the field to write of the games. In The Sun of August 2, 1884, there is this artfully penned description:

"An exciting game was played at Washington Park, Brooklyn, yesterday afternoon between the Brooklyn and Baltimore clubs. Fully 3,500 spectators were present and appeared to take the keenest interest in the sport. Kimber pitched in fine form and won the game for the home club. Emslie, the Baltimore pitcher, was batted for five earned runs, to the great delight of those present. The Baltimore players outfielded the home club."

Ten years later baseball language was established on a firm foundation all its own. There was no confusing it with the society columns. Writers were speaking of "napping on first," "clean hits," "throwing to first in time to nab Wilson." But a blunder was still a blunder and not a "bone." And a wire dispatch from Cincinnati admitted that "Emslie's umpiring provoked much fault finding." There was no mention of pop bottles nor of "razzing the ump."

The first picture writer on baseball to make his appearance in metropolitan dailies was O. P. Caylor. In The Sunday Herald of August 12, 1894, Mr. Caylor began a column story of a Brooklyn-Boston game in this manner:

"There is balm in Gilead. Also in Brooklyn. Had not the eccentric Bridegrooms checked the rush of the champions yesterday many rooters would have kept to their beds all day to-day with ice applications at intervals, for the news which came over the wire in large gobs and thickness from Baltimore [the Giants had been beaten 20 to 1] yesterday afternoon was distressive to the metropolitan minds which pulsate in the interest of championships. But, thanks awfully to the hired hands who labor at Eastern Park, our Giants, disfigured as they be, are no further from the van on this beautiful Sabbath than they were when the sun came up yesterday."

In Caylor's wake there followed a rush of inventive sporting writers. New phrases tumbled over each other, jumping into the baseball lingo.

Wire reports demanded short descriptive phrases and verbs that would carry the full story for an inning by inning report in the evening editions. So there came into existence the baseball sentence: Wingo popped to Shaw. Brown tossed out Davis. Kane walked. Smith scratched. Kane scored on Adams's Texas leaguer. Blaine fanned.

To the fan of twenty years ago this might be just as intelligible as so much Greek, but to-day he knows the value of every comma in the language, and you couldn't convince him that he hadn't always known it.

But he has to watch himself. The language of baseball waits for no laggards.

THE BLACK HEART OF MURRAY BROOME

By WILLIAM ALMON WOLFF

I ROOMED in college with Murray Broome, or Kiko, as every one still calls him. And there were times when I'd have traded Broome and rooms that would have been fine, except for him, for a cave that a grizzly bear with a bad temper was using for his winter quarters. It wasn't that I didn't like Broome, you'll understand. Lord—every one liked the chap!

We got along pretty well, really, though we did have blow-outs once in a while. And I suppose one reason for that was that we were so different. He was a big, blond brute of a chap, and he could play pitch and toss with me. He was a varsity tackle; he stroked the crew for three years. And for two years in succession, when the track team was having an awful slump, the crew let him off for four days, and he won the shot and took second in the hammer throw in the intercollegiates.

Broome wasn't just an athlete, though. He certainly wasn't a grind. But he took an honor degree, which was more than any of the rest of our crowd came near doing, and he had the same careless, indifferent way of sailing through an examination that you noticed when he was smashing holes in a line. He always slept like a baby and ate like a mastiff. Mornings were always bright and rosy for him, darn him!

I think one reason I stuck to him the way I did was that I was so sure something extra special in the way of a jolt was coming to him.

We all thought, naturally, that he'd get his bump, when it came, from a girl. Our thoughts rather ran to girls in those days; we were really adolescent, although we would not have admitted it then. And we did our best to put Broome in the way of getting the sort of punishment we were all taking. We led him up to vamps, baby and grand. And they'd turn tame as soon as he talked to them and fall in real love with him, and begin hating us, and never be any fun again.

Oh, yes, I liked Broome. But I'd given half of all I owned to see him well scared, and the rest to see some girl make him roll over and play dead—the cold-blooded old fish!

Well, it was some time after we got through college that Broome got his jolt. In the whole four years I only saw him shaken at all once. That was during our last summer vacation.

We spent a month at a camp on a lake way up in New England—I can't be too exact about things like that in telling this story—just before we went back to college for our senior year. A lot of us used to go over, quite often, to a cheap little summer amusement park a few miles away. You know the sort of thing? Merry-go-round, games of all sorts, with shoddy little prizes, freak shows. The girls liked it, and Broome liked it, too—because of Kiko.

Kiko was in one of the freak shows, and they kept him in a cage. He was the ugliest biped I'd ever seen, without exception. Some of that was make-up, of course, but we figured out that he was a negro, painted up, and with bits of fur glued on, here and there, where they'd do the most good. He used to prowl around his cage and eat raw meat and growl.

Broome insisted on going every day, and he usually dragged some one along—me, more often than not. Kiko simply fascinated him; none of us could imagine why. And the way he treated the poor freak was devilish.

He used to take him candy and peanuts and throw them at him. And if he managed to hit him on the head he'd stand and rock with laughter, while Kiko snarled and growled. Then he would stand in front of the bars and abuse Kiko and poke at him with a cane. Kiko would howl and snap at the cane with his teeth; he played the game, all right, and earned his salary.

BUT the last day we were there something happened. Summer was pretty well over, and that day it was raining and a northeaster was blowing. Broome got me to go over to the park with him; he said he wanted to say goodby to Kiko. No one was around, of course, on such a day, and most of the places had closed for the season. But Broome made them open up Kiko's place, and I suppose poor old Kiko had to get into his make-up just for Broome.

"You ugly old son of a gun!" said Broome. "I'll hunt you up next summer, wherever you are. Here's some candy!"

He threw a bag of hard candy through the bars and it hit Kiko on the nose. He howled and snarled, and then he pretended to eat some of the candy and Broome chuckled like a kid. Then he went on abusing Kiko. It was scandalous; I was ashamed of him. And then, all at once, Kiko began talking back—and it was a negro voice, sure enough.

"Yo' po' white trash—yo' Murray Broome!" he said. "I gotta black hide—but yo' gotta black heart. And I'm goin' to cut it outa yo'! I sho' am—if I have to chase yo' 'roun' the whole world!"

I laughed. Broome turned and gave me a nasty look. And then he spoke to Kiko. "Naughty—naughty!" he said. "Aren't you grateful for the nice candy?"

But he didn't look happy, and he didn't stay much longer.

The story got about at college, and he was ragged a good deal, and every one called him Kiko.

THE next year, when we had our degrees, Broome's father sent him to the Pacific Coast on business and I stayed East at law school. We kept in fairly close touch with one another, and he seemed to be going along much as usual. Then the war came along and you'd have thought that would have made a difference in Broome. But it didn't.

He landed as a captain first and then as a major in a negro regiment and came home with a wound stripe and decorations enough to start a ribbon counter. But the fellows who'd seen him in France—I never got across—told me he hadn't really changed a bit. He wasn't the sort of ass who stood up to be shot at to show he wasn't afraid; he just took things as they came. His men worshipped him, every one said; he must have been a darned good officer out there where they needed them. Yet, on the whole, he came out of the war the same old Kiko.

But it wasn't very long after that that he met my young cousin, Carol.

ALLOWING for the difference between a man and a woman, Carol matched up pretty well with Kiko when it came to being wild and disposed to jump fences. She was all right. She was. But there wasn't anything she wouldn't say, and there was precious little she wouldn't do.

She liked him well enough from the start; there was that. But I don't think it was Carol's idea to marry any one for quite a while; she wasn't very old, and she was having a tremendously good time. But when Broome really settled down to making love to her the thing was so intense that I think it frightened her a little.

"Bill," she said, "I'm crazy about him! But he scares me to death! How can you marry a man like that? He isn't human, Bill! I'd be afraid to have a headache or an attack of nerves. If I got hysterical and pitched my sewing across the room he'd look at me as if I were some wild animal that had strayed into the house by mistake. You know how I scream when I see a mouse—I'm not really afraid, but I can't help screaming. And you know how he'd take that! He'd laugh at me, and I'd want to kill him. I can't marry a man who doesn't know what nerves mean!"

CAROL did try to break the thing up once; she started quite a heavy romance with a chap called Bartlett. But that blew over, and diplomatic relations had been resumed when we all started for a camp in the Adirondacks. It was my Uncle George's camp—he's Carol's father. My aunt asked Kiko, I suppose, because she didn't know how to help herself.

The camp was on one of those lakes it might be pleasant enough to go to in an airplane. Actually, though, you go by trains and boats and buckboards and plain walking. Let's call it Lake Moquette.

Carol wanted to go as far as Albany on the boat; she said she wanted to see the river by moonlight. She had her way, of course; she always does. My aunt and uncle, Carol and Kiko and I, made up the party.

We had a table to ourselves at dinner on the boat, with two negro waiters to look after us.

I SAT next to Kiko; Carol was on the other side of him; then came my uncle and aunt. I'd missed my lunch, for some reason, so I was hungry, and I was too busy catching up, at first, to notice that there was anything out of the way. Then I began to feel something in the air, and I looked about. Pretty soon I saw that Kiko was upset about something, and I began following his eyes. And then I saw that he was looking every few seconds at one of the waiters, and that the chap never took his eyes off him.

That waiter must have been well over six feet tall, and I'll bet he didn't weigh a pound less than 220—and none of it fat. His hands were enormous—like a gorilla's. They looked as if they could tear a bar of iron in two. He was as black as coal, and he had thick, red lips and shiny white teeth. He'd evidently been a real scrapper; there was a great, livid scar on one cheek, that only a razor could have made, and he had a lot of other scars as well. One lip was all puffy and out of shape, and one ear had had misfortune, too.

Presently there was some sort of a shift between the waiters, and the big buck came around to our side. Carol needed water, or butter, or something, and Broome made a gesture.

"Yes, sah—yes, sah, Misto' Murray Broome!" said the waiter as he brought whatever was wanted.

It was just a whisper; Kiko and I were the only ones who could have heard it. But our eyes met, and I jumped; a lot of cold shivers began running up and down my spine. I remembered the last time I'd heard any one call Broome by name in that sort of voice. Broome was remembering, too.

And what we both remembered was that day at the amusement park, years before, in the rain, when Kiko the Wild Man had turned on him and promised to cut his black heart out.

We got away from the table at last. Carol went to her room for a wrap, and Broome grabbed my arm and ran me out on deck.

"Bill—did you see?" he asked.

"Yes!" I said. "What's the matter with you, Kiko?"

"Don't call me that!" He jabbered at me like a hysterical woman. "That was Kiko! Remember? He said he'd find me and cut my heart out"——

There wasn't a laugh in me. I was scared stiff. And I don't know that I'd ever liked old Broome as well as I did that minute, because he was scared, too, and he was man enough to admit it.

"No use scaring Carol," he said. "I'm going to stay with her till she turns in. I'll take her up forward, and you prowl around and do a sentry go, so that that nigger can't reach us. He probably won't try to start anything until pretty late, anyhow. Then after she's gone to bed I'll slip overboard and swim ashore. I'll jump a train and be on the Adirondack train when you get aboard. You've got the tickets, haven't you? Tell me what stateroom we have. In the morning you can fake some excuse."

That sounded pretty sensible. If Broome were on the train in Albany before the boat docked in the morning the negro would lose his trail. He would probably think Broome was hanging back.

THE rest of that evening was no joy ride for me. Broome managed mighty well. He picked out a place that could only be approached from one direction, and I planted myself in a dark spot and began smoking too many cigarettes. The boat wasn't very crowded, but there were a good many people wandering about, at that, and I never saw so many shadows in my life. They kept me on the jump all the time.

I was mighty glad when Broome and Carol came back, along about midnight.

I could see they hadn't been getting along; that was natural enough, though. Carol stopped when she saw me. "You don't look well, Bill," she said. "Don't come down with anything. Kiko behaves as if he ought to be in a psychopathic ward somewhere. I don't want to have to nurse you."

She isn't unsympathetic, really, but she's my cousin, of course. You know how it is.

I trailed along behind them while Broome took her to her door.

"We've just passed Poughkeepsie," I said. "you think you'd better try that stunt?"

"Unless you've thought of something better."

Well, I hadn't. So we went down to the lowest deck we could reach, and he took off all his clothes except his underwear, and we made a package of his things. We wrapped them in a slicker he'd brought out in case Carol was damp, and tied the bundle around his neck, so it would have a chance to stay out of the water. So, when he was ready, he dropped over, and I stayed by the rail and watched him swimming toward the shore.

I wasn't worried about him; that swim was no stunt for him. And on my way back to our room I ran into Kiko—the original Kiko. He was hanging about near our door. He put out his hand to stop me, and when he spoke his voice was as gentle as a little child's. But there was a quality in it that made my flesh creep, just the same. "Could yo' tell me whe' all I could see Misto' Murray Broome fo' a minute, sah?" he asked me.

"He's asleep—he's sick," I said. "You can't see him to-night." I wondered if it would occur to him to cut out some of me on account. But he just shook his head, sorrowfully.

"Then I reckon I'll have to wait till mornin'," he said, and took himself off.

I was about all in when I finally crawled into my berth. I didn't sleep very well.

Things looked better in the morning, of

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